

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony to you this afternoon.

My name is Julie Meyer and I am a Simsbury resident and parent of three children in Simsbury Public Schools. My involvement with Project Choice is very simple; I work to foster friendships and a welcoming atmosphere among my children and other suburban children and the Hartford/Choice students who attend Simsbury schools.

This afternoon, I provide testimony as a very satisfied "client" of the Project Choice program! Approximately once a month I request late bus transportation for 8-10 Hartford/Choice elementary school children to return home from Simsbury after the close of an after school outing that involves them and their peers who live in Simsbury. During the course of the three years that I have been involved in orchestrating these after school activities, I have experienced the highest level of satisfaction with the professionalism and friendliness of the staff. I have been very impressed with their efficient handling of my requests. Not once has the late bus arrived late. Not once has the bus driver been unprofessional. Not once has there been a complaint from a child's parent indicating that his/her child was late to arrive home or that he/she had a problem on the bus. Not once have I been told 'NO', even to my unusual requests, or when I call at the last minute, just missing their 11:00 AM request deadline.

Think of the potential for what could go wrong when primary school-aged children are being bussed 10-15 miles directly to their homes, often times in the early evening hours when it's already dark outside. Many of these kids are too young to know their addresses or phone numbers in the event that there's a mix-up. It doesn't take much for logistical problems to occur and bad experiences to result.

If I were to encounter problems with the transportation, either from the front-end, when I request the bus, or at the back-end when the bus arrives, I would not participate at the level that I do. During the three years that I've been involved I forgot to order a bus for one event. I had to drive four girls to Hartford; each to her home. It took me two hours of continually pulling off the side of the road to check my Hartford map in order to get these girls to their homes in both the north and south ends of Hartford. If I had to do that again, at no fault of my own but rather due to a mix up in the scheduling, etc., I can assure you that I would not be able to continue to coordinate after-school social activities that include both suburban and Choice students. If the state were to make modifications to the administration of the Project Choice/ CREC program and the program is impacted negatively, the ramifications are far reaching.

In closing, I would like to share a story with you. Last summer I was able to obtain scholarship money that allowed me to send four Simsbury elementary Choice students to a West Hartford sponsored summer camp. I had to rely on Project Choice/CREC to process the donation and make payment to West Hartford on behalf of the students. I relied on Project Choice to provide month-long transportation to and from the program for the students. There was not a single glitch, and these four young students had a wonderful summer as a result. In the thank you note to the donor, Pratt and Whitney, one of the attendees wrote, "thank you for my best summer ever! I never had fun in the summer before!" The Project Choice program is so beneficial to both the Hartford and suburban families. Please work to ensure the best outcome for the Project Choice Program. Thank you.